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Theodor Fontane's Novels:

An Appreciation

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THEODOR FONTANE'S NOVELS:
AN APPRECIATION

BY

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A. B. James Milliken University, 1914

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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June 4th 1915

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPER-
VISION BY Miss Fay Lynton Fisher
ENTITLED Theodor Fontane's Novels: An Appreciation

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF Master of Arts

O. E. Lessing

In Charge of Thesis

Miss Cochel

Head of Department

Recommendation concurred in:*

Committee

on

Final Examination*

*Required for doctor's degree but not for master's.

THEODORE FONTANE'S NOVELS: AN APPRECIATION

I. INTRODUCTION.

The warm and genial quality of self-expression, the reflective skill, the winning humour, the catholic taste for life which Theodore Fontane shows in greatest measure, perhaps, in his later novels, seem inevitable when one reads his Meine Kinderjahre. Certainly his early experience was not wholly roseate, and his development was not retarded by lack of misfortune, of denials of desire and struggles. Yet in his first relations with the world the individual color of his later genius seems to be foreshaded. He was born in December, 1819, in the apothecary's establishment of his father at Neu-Ruppin. Both his parents were of the Berlin French colony; perhaps his French blood may be traced in what he calls his "plauderhaften Zug." His mother was a woman of passionate temperament, yet of rigid conscientiousness. His father he calls the consistent type of a humorous visionary. It was the practical deficiencies of the elder Fontane which led the family into financial difficulties

and made it necessary that Theodore be apprenticedⁿ to an apothecary at sixteen. Employment in Berlin, Leipzig, and Dresden followed. It was during his year of military service, 1844-45, that he had a fortnight's leave of absence for a journey to England, which was the first of a series. That event naturally gave a great impetus to his already existing English interests.

His volumes of English and Scotch travels show remarkable freedom and color, and his first noteworthy success was attained with the ballads so strongly influenced by Percy's Reliques and Scott's Minstrelsy. Such ballads as those he studied and imitated, with their contained expression, their intensity of lofty simplicity, must have left deep traces upon his later style, even though his attention was later transferred to a very different sort of material. That his work included both imitations of Chevy Chase and ballads on subjects rooted in German ground, is an indication of the two elements - enduring feeling for his homeland and vivid outreaching interest - which influenced him consistently. Archibald Douglas and Von der schönen Rosamunde are as successfully characteristic as Der Tag von Hemmingstedt. Fontane's ballads in celebration of the great Prussian war-heroes are probably the best-known part of his work. To a large public, indeed, he has never appeared as a novelist, but has remained the poet of the ballads. Although his greatest achievements were

reached in the new department of activity in which his maturer years were spent, and although at the time of the ballads he had not yet in perfection his later individually charming flavor in selection and style, yet an understanding of his earlier work repays cultivation richly.

If we think of the author's work as, in a sense, of one piece, and if the ballad composition may be regarded as a prelude, the travels and biographical works formed an actual preparation for the climax reached in the novels.

"Neither the Wanderungen durch die Mark nor the war-books made the name of Fontane great. But in both lay the broad and deep source whence his poetic power grew. The Wanderungen strengthened his feeling for his homeland, the wars strengthened the feeling for his own times, and his homeland and his own times are the two forces which drew forth the poet's highest and best." The duties of a theatrical critic and those of a war-correspondent likewise were stages in Fontane's long preparatory journey. He refused to retain a secretaryship of the Royal Academy of the Arts, because he preferred to retain his freedom of opinion and because he felt that the construction "Theater-Fremdling," put upon his initials "Th. F.", with which he signed criticisms, was all too well founded. In reality his theatrical comment was sane, penetrating and genial, if it was offered with the lack of ostentation which charac-

terized him. It was during the stay of six years in England, (1852, 1855-1859), in his function of newspaper correspondent for the government, that he rounded out his schooling in cosmopolitanism. In his career as war-reporter he was captured and imprisoned in a French fortress (1870) where he underwent the harassing yet rich experiences he gives us in Kriegsgefangen.

Such a manifold apprenticeship, served by a man of Fontane's peculiar endowments, was the fittest approach to his course as the pathfinder of modern realism. Only such a rich life-experience added to precisely such a nature could have given us "das spezifisch Fontan'sche" which is always at the core of his work, particularly of his later novels. The kindly keenness and the fine poise of his own nature disposed him to a universal and penetrating observation of the lives of men and women, and that observation reacted automatically in turn to give him an even finer fibre. The particular touchstone which made such reaction possible was the Fontane humour, - a gem beautiful, rare and precious. His clear vision and large vision enabled him to keep his deep and perpetually re-creating fountain of humour, and that humour enabled him to keep his serenity in a world whose complexities he had full cause to know.

Because his work had always somewhat of a prophetic character, Fontane never found a ready popular favor; the

tokens of success came late to him. That fact, of course, offered a persistent temptation to bitterness, and would justify misanthropy if anything might, but the poet was too well-balanced to be permanently overcome. He hated the cheap spirit of the bourgeois, which seemed to sway Berlin; his own simplicity and sincerity revolted from the repetitions of dollar-mindedness and pretentious sham which it was easy to see about him. His admirable satires on "Berlinismus", such as "Erfolganbeter" and "Was mir fehlte" remain as sharply telling as when he wrote them. He quotes with keen appreciation his friend Faucher's saying, - "In Berlin glücken immer nur Sachen, die'n Groschen kosten." Yet with all his native scorn of these littlenesses, he was able to remain poised, cheerful, humorous.

The skill of Fontane's later technique is a matter for wonder to one considering the deficiencies of his formal training. He had been half self-taught even in his earlier grounding. The transition from the almost formless discursiveness of Vor dem Sturm to the virtuosity of Effi Briest was the result of a later course of self-discipline. Again, and chiefly here, his universal observations, his power of understanding, his rich fund of life experience came to his aid. To be sure, it was the variety of his information which had caused the redundancy of Vor dem Sturm, but longer examination and finer weighing taught him the secret of

effective presentation. The scenes he had known in the London debating-clubs, in military captivity, in the "Tunnel", his Berlin literary society, in barracks, in the apothecary's shop all did him service, first as isolated material, later as parts of the finished knowledge of how to convey much in little.

As we have implied in comments on the poise and ripened serenity of Fontane's life, he was fundamentally a man of moderation. That balancing principle manifested itself again in his deep-seated aversion to exaggerated display of feeling. He was by no means a mocker at sentiment, but foolish over-stress on a feeling easily turned it into a parody for him. On this score also he satirizes the bourgeois attitude. Frau Jenny Treibel, whom he characterized as the perfect type of bourgeoisie, thought that her soul was utterly given to beautiful and tender sentimentalizings, and she was fond of saying that material things were of no account toward happiness, but in reality she was entirely incapable of judging by any standard but that of money. The honest, hearty war-reports which mentioned beefsteak and red wine were much more to the poet's taste than lofty accounts of exalted and over-done heroism, and he was too wise to believe that the world dies of its emotions.

The same sense of "Mass" which restrained the author from an over-reaching emotionalism, kept him from pessimism. He saw the sordid in life's relations, indeed, but he saw

beauty to balance it. Again his universality helped him to interpret events. He rarely made the mistake of seizing a single occurrence and giving it isolated as an illustration of some stark force in the world. He had the wisdom of seeing relations, of making a manifold approach to his subject; he recognized the complexity of all the factors in life. It was this balance which excluded pessimism from his philosophy, and which made his conception of realism so different from that of the grubbing sort of Zola, for example. Fontane proposed to present the reality of life, not the reality of the ugliness of life. "Genuine realism", he says, "must always contain beauty, too, for the beautiful, Thank Heaven, belongs to life quite as much as the ugly." - (Letters to His Family, Vol. II, p. 35).

II. THE HISTORICAL NOVELS.

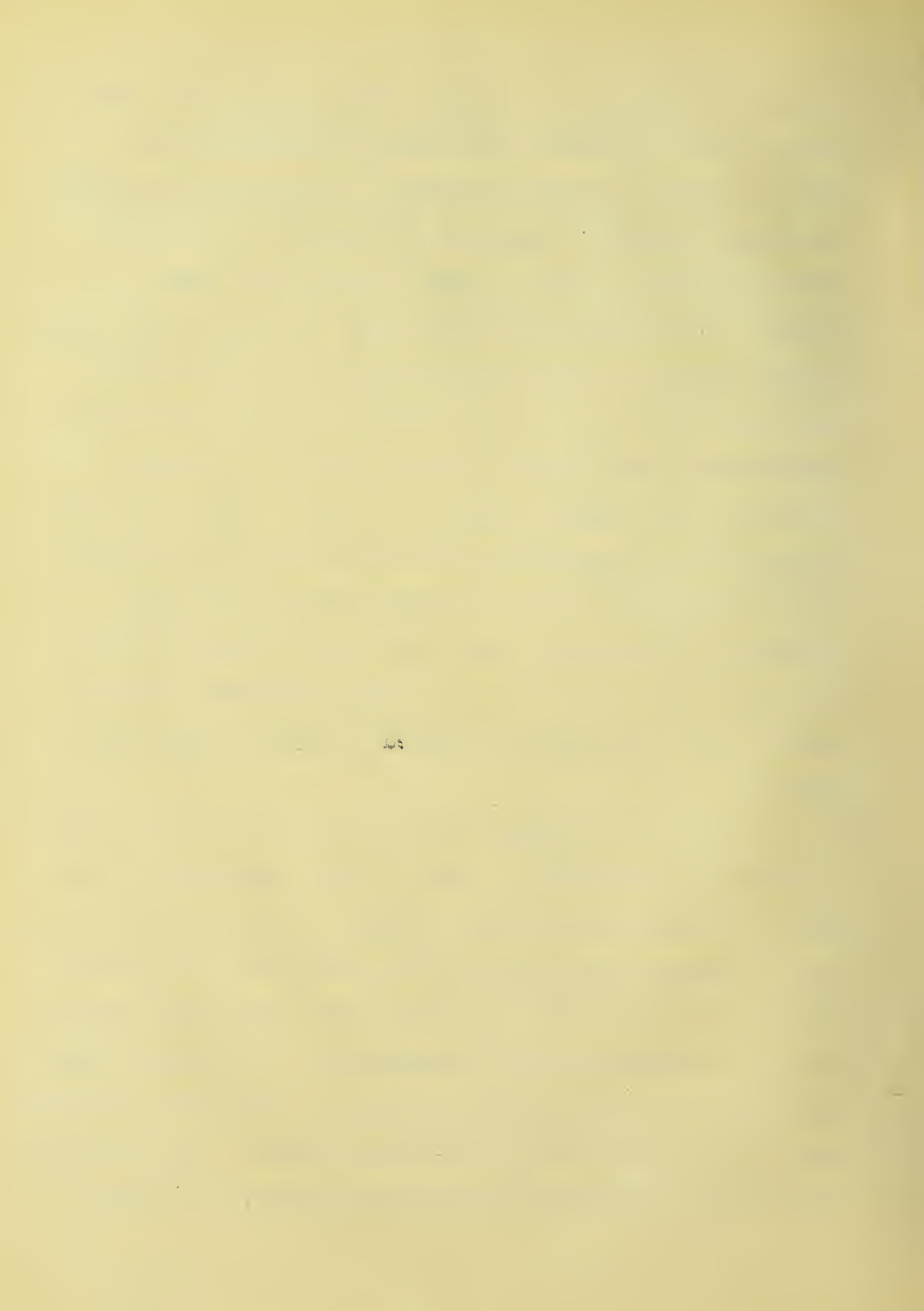
It was a natural and yet a long step from the Wanderungen durch die Mark, those unconstrained and sunny excursions among the geographical and historical treasures of Fontane's homeland, to a novel built upon the history of that same Mark, for the transition involved the first test of the poet's powers in narrative fiction. From 1878, when he published Vor dem Sturm, his self-undertaken schooling was to lay heavy emphasis on the art of narration. This first novel, a picture of the times in Prussia during the winter of 1812-1813, is of monumental scope. Its author was not content with presenting the happenings in the lives of a narrow circle, allowing those to mirror national events; he enters great new fields of description and covers countless by-paths of interest. He has construed the task of the writer of a historical novel as a picturing in searching detail of the little-known and significant interludes between towering events, and in fulfilling that conception he has

been successful, - too successful. An immense wealth of comparative material is heaped up, a great picture-gallery with a thousand unexpected niches is opened for us. We become acquainted with some hundred characters and inspect an endless variety of scenes, ranging from the palace of the old Prince Ferdinand to the cheap Berlin "Lokal" where the zealous citizens discuss the war with gusto, from the almost witty and learned society about the Countess Pudagla to the band of village outcasts in the "Forstacker", from the castle of the Ladalinskis in Poland to the antiquarian collection of Pastor Seidentopf.

Lewin von Vitzewitz is a student in the University of Berlin. He takes part in the life of a cosmopolitan literary club, and has attention besides for the vagaries of Berlin life about him. At length he gives up his attendance at the lectures, and with his cousin Tubal von Ladalinski (with whose sister Kathinka he is infatuated), returns to his home in the country to aid his father, Berndt von Vitzewitz, in the latter's cherished scheme for a local armed crusade against the French occupation. General York has just denied Napoleon in Russia, the Emperor's forces seem at low ebb, and the time for a bold stroke is evidently at hand. Since the King has refused to order a general armament, Vitzewitz advocates a local uprising. The days of martial activity are an unwonted excitement in the quiet

existence of the estate village, Hohen-Vietz, and in the lives of Lewin's sister Renate and her friend Marie, adopted daughter of Mayor Kniehase. The expedition which the elder Vitzewitz's impetuous patriotism has dictated proves ill-fated; Lewin is taken prisoner and Tubal is killed. In Kathinka and Tubal alike, brilliant and lovable as they may be, we feel the distinction of Polish blood from the German as it is represented in Lewin and Renate. Kathinka has eloped with a Polish officer, and Tubal, although he has engaged himself to Renate, still shows the characteristic instability up to his last deed of bravery. Lewin is rescued from his captivity by the aid of the grotesque old messenger-dwarf, his friend Hoppen-marieken. Time shows him that it is gentle Marie Kniehase whom he really loves, and they are granted a long and happy life together.

Here is the central thread around which such a broad and many-colored ^lfabric is woven. The indication of the spirit of the period in the workings of individual destinies is only partly accomplished in the portrayal of our chief characters; it depends on the extensive and minute picture of contemporaneous life for completion. Far too much has been included in the picture and given coordinate rank, however, to allow any sort of a unified result. The building-material for the book has accumulated until, by its own



very mass, it forbids any selective construction. Yet if the riches of the novel are in far from compact form, they are not unavailable. None who has known the characters and felt the experiences of Vor dem Sturm can preserve a distant attitude toward the happenings of 1812. One knows what sort of thing it was to live in that year, and that there was a vivid present then as well as now.

If the essential economy of construction was still lacking, in minor respects the Fontane style was already molding itself into its final form. Numerous single scenes are worthy of a painting or of dramatic representation. Lieutenant Jürgass's dinner for the Kastalia, Lewin's literary club - , with its easy atmosphere, its assemblage of the most varied characters, all drawn "kurz und knapp", takes its place beside the Countess Pudagla's theatrical entertainment for her miniature court, composed of retired generals, small statesmen, neighboring land-owners and an adventurer or two. The encounter between the Vitzewitz-housekeeper, the rigorous Tante Schorlemmer, of the Herrnhut persuasion and late a missionary to the Esquimaux, and the wicked old wordly-wise General von Bamme is entirely delightful. The party given by Frau Hulen, Lewin's old Berlin landlady, is described with an irresistible suppressed chuckle. Here we find for the first time how thoroughly Fontane knew his Berlin and his compatriots there. When Herr Nuntius Schimmelpenning,

standing bolt upright through the party, presses together his protruding lips, then opens them with a little smacking puff, disdaining to acknowledge introductions further than by lowering his chin belligerently into his neck, and meanwhile surveying everything which moves under his observation with an air of being remarkably out-of-place in such disgustingly humble surroundings, we are reminded deliciously of Dickens. If there is material for a score of novels in Vor dem Sturm, it is material for a score of good ones, for none of it is dull. The too-great stretch of the work does not prevent its being shot through with gleams of the Fontane charm, and its very inclusiveness presages the well-rounded character of the later works.

Five years after the appearance of Vor dem Sturm Fontane published Schach von Wuthenow - "Erzählung aus der Zeit des Regiments Gensdarmes." A remarkable development in workmanship had marked those five years. Here the author has quite as wide and as profitable a field for historic excursions as in his first novel, but he confines himself in far greater degree to telling his story. Rittmeister Schach von Wuthenow of the Gensdarmes is a handsome man of impressive and attractive presence, with a firm belief in his regiment, in the infallibility of the Prussian army, and, it must be confessed, in his own dignity. He has a disposition toward true knightliness, but his nature is hemmed in by an extraordinary dependence upon externals, upon seemliness and

conventional gentility and the world's approval. He visits frequently the charming widow Josephine von Carayon and her daughter Victoire, whose beauty, once the equal of her mother's, has been marred by smallpox. Although he has come into somewhat intimate standing with the mother, he is unwilling to allow his name to be linked with the daughter's, because of her unseemly disfigurement. In an unlucky moment he finds her attractive, however, and when her mother demands reparation, he finds that her name has become linked with his. He has been cruelly caricatured, and lampooned far and wide. That knowledge galls him unbearably; he retires to his own estate to brood over his disgrace. Frau von Carayon carries her case to the king and queen; Schach is summoned to the royal presence and admonished to his duty of marriage. Now he casts indecision aside and returns to Berlin. He is composed and graciously attentive to his bride during the banquet which follows their wedding. He hastens back to his lodgings to make ready for the wedding journey, but when the carriage stops before his door, he is found dead inside. He has used the pistol in his hand to restore his honor.

The development of Schach seems to me one of the best of Fontane's more consistent and sustained pieces of character drawing. The craftsman had not yet reached the fruition of objective style, but he had learned to lay wise limits for himself. In this instance he is content with giving us a

representative fragment rather than a cross section of the times, and his story is intent enough on its own tragedy to preserve unity. A great stage in Fontane's progress had been marked by the story Grete Minde, (1880), a simple and admirably told tale of the Mark in the sixteenth century. Shortly before his death he had planned another historical novel, Die Ligatedeler, which was to deal with certain bold, half-mythical pirates of the fourteenth century. Although his writings give no impression of incompleteness, a final historical novel, closing the circle of the writer's progress, would have been interesting matter for comparison.

III. THE EARLIER MODERN SOCIAL NOVELS (1882-1890).

The gradual upward slope of the years brought Fontane only in 1882 to the edge of that field in which his great achievement was to have its place. The work which was to proclaim him a young author, the founder and leader of the younger school, was done after he had passed his sixty-second year. In Vor dem Sturm he had dealt skillfully with the Berlin of earlier days; even though a very different task confronted him in his modern novels, which were also to be of Berlin, yet the value of his preparation is manifest. At last the long growing-time which has been indicated before, had begun to show its fruits. The time for the harvest had come. L'Adultera was the first of Fontane's social novels; it was also the first of its particular kind in Germany, and the pathfinder for the new realism. Its appearance may well have caused a sensation in the circles into which it was ushered. Here was a book of unconventional matter, honestly

treated. Yet L'Adultera, contrary to a not uncommon impression, has none of the stamp of the sensational work; it is not, in any real sense, of the stuff of which cheap books are made.

The beautiful Melanie de Caparoux was married at seventeen, largely for the sake of family finances, to Ezechiel van der Straaten, a Berlin banker of Jewish Hollander extraction and much older than she. Melanie, says her creator, "had grown up as the spoiled child of an aristocratic house, and had been reared in the most fortunate circumstances. Her gracious gaiety was almost greater than her esprit, and her loveliness greater than either. All the advantages of French blood seemed united in her. Were the weaknesses there too?" Her husband is an estimable man, sound at heart, but of unpleasing exterior, given to small selfishnesses and tasteless conversation. It is not at all out of accord with his notion of the proprieties to hang above his desk a copy of Tintoretto's L'Adultera as a sort of reminder of what he is to expect of his wife. The rough edges of Van der Straaten's character bruise with increasing violence Melanie's fine instinct for the gracious. When Ebenezer Rubehn, a business associate and representative of a friendly and influential house of Frankfort, comes for an extensive stay in her home, she accepts him as a diversion.

Presently she finds that her relation to this reserved, widely-travelled and knightly young man has passed beyond her control in her present situation. She arranges for flight with him. When her husband discovers her plans and begs her to stay, even in a continuation of present relations, in order that an open disaster may be avoided, she refuses, preferring to brave society's displeasure hardily. Not to make her task harder, she even denies herself a last sight of her children. Her divorce and re-marriage in Italy follow. After the return to Berlin, a new test of mettle comes in facing social ostracism and financial reverses. The mettle is by no means lacking, however, and happiness can not fail to be won by such a gallant attempt. As the young people celebrate their daughter's first Christmas, a gift of reconciliation arrives from Van der Straaten, - a miniature of Tintoretto's L'Adultera, with, as Melanie had once said, "so much innocence in her guilt."

The book has been characterized as unconvincing, uninspiring, a chronicle of caprice. "The actual love-development of the novel," says Adolf Stern, "involves so much that is capricious, blasé, so much dissatisfaction, satiety, arrogance and over-estimation of trivial external matters that it is impossible to give it a warmer sympathy than that of psychological understanding."* The characters

* Studien zur Literatur der Gegenwart, p. 212.

have been criticized for lack of color and force, the narration for too great reticence. Perhaps in this last item the kernel of the whole objection lies. As we have seen, Fontane's nature was essentially averse to any soaring ecstasy of emotion or prolonged revelry of feeling. His strength lay in his sense of reality and his humane acceptance of the great happenings of life and death. Because of this lack of elaboration in emotional crises, his style was less easily adapted to pioneering in unbroken territory than that of many other writers.

In L'Adultera he was dealing with new matter, or rather with a new conception of morality. The motives of his characters, it seems to me, are sufficiently developed, probably not sufficiently exposed and dwelt upon. The "trivial external matters" which seem to act as deciding factors are only so many little springs issuing from a deep-buried fountain-head. The easy conclusion, for example, is that Melanie turns to Ruben in mere restless frivolity, demanding of him flattery and a diversion from the monotony of her summer retreat. In reality, practically every fact told us in the preceding chapters weighs in the balances at the time of her desperate act, and even more decisive than the stated facts is the wealth of implications. Even the apparent digressions, such as the early description of the Van der Straaten dinner-party, are trenchantly significant.

At the party in question, we have as a background for Ezechiël van der Straaten's unbridled rawness, the intolerable pettiness of the circle of familiars of the house. The smiling and politic brother-in-law, the insufferable old Legationsrat, who, because of his constant arrogant depreciation of everything in the world but his own peerless self, has earned the title of "Negationsrat", the prattling artists and the smug minister of police, notable only for his questionable anecdotes, are the elements of Melanie's meagre and self-centered set, actuated by forces which are in the end only shadows of forces. Her women friends, besides her inconsequential sister, are the poor little misshapen Fräulein Friederike von Sawatski and the "Klavier- und Singe-fräulein" Anastasia Schmidt, both limited, if loyal characters and regular recipients of favors. Fontane does not, as the present vogue would dictate, make his heroine cry out that she is stifling, that she must have room to grow and live. Yet it is a plain psychological impossibility for such a woman as Melanie to live an honestly satisfied life in such an environment.

Melanie van der Straaten is no pitiable character who allows herself to be betrayed by petty dissatisfactions and ill-considered passion into a disastrous escapade. She considers on the one side the gulf, impossible to cross, between

her and her husband and the endless and increasing insignificance and sham of the existence before her, on the other side the personification in Ruben, not only of her love, but of all that is honest, fine and up-reaching in her desire for life. Enduring her period of anguish and guilt, she chooses constructively. To her old servant who attempts to dissuade her from her plans, she says, "Ach, meine gute Christel, ... man kann auch treu sein, wenn man untreu ist. Treuer als in der Treue." When her husband, in his love for her and his eagerness to shield her, calls what has happened inevitable in the course of events, and pleads with her to stay, she answers, "There is a law written in every heart, and by that law I know that I must go. ... I talk about guilt, but how is it really? I want to go away, not through guilt but through pride; I must go in order to restore myself in my own respect. I can not bear lies any longer; I want to see relations clearly, - open my eyes again."

When, after her marriage to Ruben, he tells her of the loss of his property, she cries, "Oh, now everything will be all right again. Now I can prove myself. Now my time is coming. Now I can show that what happened had to happen, because I loved you, not because I was living only for the day and just wanted to exchange a comfortable life for a still more comfortable one." Surely a woman of these

capabilities is far removed from shallow cowardliness. In her characterization, indeed, the power and sureness of Effi Briest are by no means reached. Nevertheless, her bitter situation, her persistent courage, the restrained and genuine pathos that lies between the lines, compel one to at least as warm a sympathy as with any other of Fontane's heroines, unless it be Lene Nimpstsch. If less can be said of the figure of the lover, Ruben, there is justification in the fact that less is demanded of him. The great appeal of the work and the individual somewhat which removes it from sensationalism may, it seems to me, be traced to the omission of "heavy passages" and the delicacy of touch on difficult matters. The novel is rich not only in hidden dramatic possibilities, but in beauty of description and grace of presentation as well. The mottled leafy light and shade and the peacocks on the lawn of the Tiergarten villa, the stillness of the old gardener's greenhouse, the starlight and rippling water at Stralow might atone for many deficiencies of technique. Surely many will feel, in contradiction to Herr Stern's statement, that there is an element in this story which leaves a deep impression on the imagination and on the soul.

The first successor of L'Adultera in the new field was Graf Petöfy, published in 1884. This second "society novel" shows by no means the advancement over L'Adultera which

the latter had shown over its predecessor. The genuine stamp of the Fontane personality is not impressed on the work as sharply as we should have expected, although the matter shows it more clearly than the style. Here comes into prominence the poet's self-acknowledged "fondness for the anecdote and still more for detailed description requiring a great deal of space." He wanders again into by-paths, branching but never tedious, and lays characteristic emphasis on trivial matters, provided, as he says, that they be not really trivial but full of inner significance.

Graf Adam von Petöfy, according to the estimate of his wife Franziska's keen-sighted maid and friend, "is old and would like to be young. He plays the part of a man of the world and is merely a Viennese, and he believes that all the women are mad about him, when he is really only being led around by the nose. But he isn't just a simpleton, either. Sometimes he comes very close to it, for he has all the follies of an old bachelor and hanger-on at the theater. But in the end he is quite different from that. I believe he has a good and fine, and even a noble heart." Wearied of his unprofitable and somewhat lonely life in his apartments isolated in the opposite wing of the old mansion from those of his pious sister, the Countess Judith, he proposes to marry the animated and charming young actress, Franziska Franz. There is to be no mockery of love in the

arrangement; by making her his wife he wishes to put her in the position in which he can do most for her, and in return for boundless consideration she shall lighten his burden of years. In cognizance of many factors, not the least important of which is her loneliness, Franziska accepts his offer. We see in great abundance of detail the beginning of their life together, which in many auspicious features seems to promise a fulfillment of the old Count's hopes. But the inevitable attraction of youth for youth asserts itself between Franziska and the Count's handsome nephew, Egon, Graf Asperg. When it is too late Graf Adam realizes that his marriage could never have been other than ill-omened, for whereas he thought he was asking nothing of his wife, he was in reality demanding her renunciation of youth and of a normal course of life. Gallantly he fights out his battle and when he has made his decision, quietly takes his own life in order to give Franziska hers. She, woman of sense and feeling that she is, has meanwhile come to a true understanding of values, and putting away her inclination for Egon, she turns her mind to good works.

Graf Petöfy is not a forceful novel; it possesses charms rather than charm. It is refreshing, for example, to be told that the life-eager old man chooses Franziska for his wife because of her distinguished talent for gracious,

airy yet sensible chatter, but the characters are so little compelling that one is not forced to acquiesce in the choice. The delineation is broad rather than pointed. Although the novel has its bits of excellent genre painting, it attains nowhere the vivid strokes which would entitle it to a place of high importance among its author's works.

In 1887 Fontane published Cécile. In the unpretentious story of an unfortunate beauty, there undoubtedly appears, if not a complete crystallization of the novelist's powers, at least a certain increase of firmness, - what might be called a sharpening of style, were it not that our author's style is never sharp. Cécile Woronesch von Zacha, daughter of a noble but down-at-heels Polish family, has had a training which looked to the art of being prettily enticing, and to little else. When we are told that her widowed mother, beautiful but as limited in character and mentality as in money, always spent the quarterly installment of her income in the first days after its receipt and for the next twelve weeks lived on raisins and almonds we have a key to the understanding of Cécile's earlier career. The family, the mother and three daughters, was always in the figurative attitude of waiting eagerly at the window for the prince who was to ride by and choose one of the number. When the old Prince of Welfen-Echingen did come, it did not even occur

to Cécile, with her preparation, to say no to his proposals. At his death she inherited a generous property and became the mistress of his nephew and successor. Upon the death of this sickly second lover she returned to her family and lived in retirement. It was during this period that she attracted the attention of Lieutenant-Colonel von St. Arnaud, brilliant soldier and man-about-town, considerably older than Cécile. When St. Arnaud announced his intention of marrying the lady of shadowed reputation, Lieutenant-Colonel Dzialinski protested in the name of the garrison's corps of officers; a duel ensued, in which Dzialinski fell. The marriage which followed St. Arnaud's withdrawal from the service was therefore attended by a very perceptible cloud. The colonel has become a gambling-shark, the family social station is ambiguous. The thing which keeps them from becoming the ordinary doubtful and adventuring couple, however, is a contradiction in Cécile's character. Back of the set of standards which her mother's precept and example and her own experience have given her, she has a singular sort of sense of moral responsibility, which manifests itself in regret not so much for the kind of part she has played, per se, as for the loss of a man's life which must be charged to her account.

After her severe nervous illness, caused by brooding

over what she feels to be her own guilt, her husband takes her to a Swiss mountain-resort. There they meet Herr von Gordon-Leslie, a young engineer of Scotch extraction. In contrast to St. Arnaud's character of man-about-town, Gordon may be described as a man of the world. He becomes the more or less intimate companion of the St. Arnauds in their holiday rambles. He is irresistibly drawn to a powerful interest in Cécile by her coupling of a dreamy and eagerly child-like nature with the genuine aloofness of high caste and the sophistication of experience. When, after becoming acquainted with her history, he declares his inclination, she speaks to him honestly and appeals to him for support in the only course which can fulfill her responsibility to the past. Summoning his manliness, he promises to renounce his wishes, but when he finds the bland Counsellor Hedemeyer seemingly in enjoyment of the favor which has been denied him, his resolves are swept away in a torrent of violent resentment. Gordon's bitter conviction of having been a dupe betrays him into decidedly unchivalrous conduct. In an unseasonable and unwarranted visit he reproaches Cécile without restraint. Hurt to the core by his injustice, she deals with him patiently, and the affair would have been of small external moment if it had not come to the attention of the gambler-colonel, her husband. Evidently without a trace of jealousy, he yet

insists upon a duel because of the young Scotchman's unpardonable violation of form. As expected by those who know St. Arnaud's reputation as a shot, Gordon is killed. In the simple and final conviction that she has no right and no need to live after having caused the death of two men, Cécile chloroforms herself.

Although in the treatment of its tragic theme the novel is rather deliberate and thorough than gripping and concentrated, it achieves a singular effectiveness. Again we have inordinate space given to the description of excellently typical but fairly irrelevant characters, and again there is no powerful flight of the narrative. In spite of these facts, the bulk of the material contributes faithfully to the main issues, as I have tried to indicate in the sketch of the plot. We are made to feel finely and clearly the contrast between St. Arnaud and Gordon, the contrast between Cécile and her environment, between her acquired guilt and her native innocence, and, above all, between the happiness for which he was created and the tragedy to which she was doomed. Quite without élan, Cécile possesses a penetrating quality and contains a central portrait so well-done, that, rare occurrence, its appeal increases with length of remembrance.

The work which is sometimes felt to have been the

culmination of Fontane's power, which certainly marked the reaching of his highest plane in some respects, and which brought his first popular success, is Irrungen Wirrungen (1888). Undoubtedly his "Berlinismus" has come into full flower here; the infusion of the colour of the city is not richer even in Frau Jenny Treibel, where the whole novel is dependent on its presence. Irrungen Wirrungen is cast, besides, in a more characteristic mold and has a faster seal of individuality than any of the Fontane novels which preceded it, - perhaps than any which followed it. Wavering style, uncertain touch and ineffective handling of character have disappeared; another stage in the poet's schooling is finished. "Nowhere else", says R. M. Meyer, "is he such a decided realist as here, renouncing all naturalistic or idealistic effects to give us merely a simple bit of reality. Never before had his technique of language attained such completeness. ... A classic of modern realism was needed. For a long time conditions would have allowed of its production; now it could not be dispensed with any longer, and it was received with acclamation."*

The young officer Botho von Rienacker, eldest son of a noble family of the Mark, has met by chance the little seamstress Lene Nimptsch, and has cultivated the acquaintance

 * Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im 19ten Jahrhundert, p. 567.

into intimacy. Lene is a child of Berlin, but much more than that; she is sensible but imaginative, without high pretension, but without all pettiness, matter-of-fact but capable of the greatest heroism. These deep-rooted traits, once discovered, hold Botho by their correspondence to his own tendencies. Possessed of the ordinary qualities of the socially assured young officer, he yet has an inmost nature quite opposed to the customary life of his kind. His real bent is toward unpretentiousness, frankness, quiet pleasures and simple relationships; the position into which he was born demands that these be put aside for the courtly and ostentatious. He finds his keenest joy in his connection with Lene, and his best hours are spent before the fire in her tiny garden-cottage in unconstrained chatter with the old mother Nimptsch and her imposing neighbor, Frau Dörr. There has been no element of betrayal in the relation of the young people; both understand quite clearly that the bond between them can not last, that some fine day their idyll must be destroyed. But the time of severing comes sooner than they have expected. Botho's station in the world steps forward to demand tribute. His mother urges his marriage, for financial and social reasons, to Käthe Sellethin, a childhood friend. With steady head and sinking heart, he weighs possibilities in the event of his

refusal. He realizes his own capabilities, those of the "average man from the upper sphere of society." He knows that if he defies the order of the world, cleaves openly to Lene and is cast off by society, as he inevitably would be, he is not strong enough to make anything but misery for her and ruin for himself of the consequences. He must yield; their happiness must end. There is a last excursion to "Hänkel's Ablage", marred by the advent of officers from Botho's set with their friends - ladies of a doubtful sort who afford Lene an effectively contrasting background, - and after that there is the wonderful evening of parting.

"Lene received him as she always did; there was not the slightest trace of reproach or even of painful renunciation in her face. ... It was still; they could just hear a little chirping from the fields, and the moon hung in the sky above them. She leaned close to him and said quietly and heartily, 'And so this is the last time that I'll hold your hand in mine?'

'Yes, Lene. Can you forgive me?'

'Why do you keep asking? What should I forgive you for?'

'For hurting you.'

'Yes, it hurts, That's true.'

She was silent and looked up at the pale stars coming out in the sky.

'What are you thinking about, Lene?'

'How beautiful it would be to be up there.'

'Don't say that. You musn't wish your life away.

It's only a step from such a wish to'

She smiled. 'No, not that. I'm not like the girl that ran to the fountain and jumped in because her lover danced with another. Do you remember telling me about that?'

'But what do you mean then? You're not the kind to say anything just to be saying it.'

'No, I meant it in earnest. And I would really like to be up there. I could have peace there. But I can wait ... Now that my heart is light, I'll tell you. I've seen it coming, from the beginning, and nothing is happening but what must happen. When we've had a beautiful dream, we must thank God and not complain when the dream stops and reality begins. It is hard now, but some day you will be happy again, and perhaps I will too.'

'You think so? And if not, what then?'

'Then we'll live without happiness You have done me no wrong. You promised me nothing. It was my own free decision. I loved you from my heart and that was my destiny. My guilt, if it was guilt, was my happiness. ... Farewell, my only one! Be as happy as you deserve, as happy as you've made me. Don't talk about the other any more,

it isn't worth talking about.'

She gave him a kiss, and another, and closed the gate. When he had come to the other side of the street, he seemed about to return and exchange word and kiss her once more. But she motioned him away imperatively. And so he went down the street, while she looked after him with wide eyes, leaning her head on her arm and her arm on the gate-post.

She stood so for a long time, until there was no sound of steps echoing in the still night."

In a few months Botho is married to Käthe, in whose presentation the finest shading of skill is used. We have no impossible, unattractive figure as a foil to Lene. The bride is a dainty, sprightly and gracious little spoiled beauty. For most men she would typify loveliness, but to Botho, who can never free himself from the remembrance of the noble simplicity of his earlier love, her endless chatter seems silly and her assured superficiality is unsatisfying. In time Lene too is married, to the pious middle-aged mechanic Gideon Franke, not without having told him her history unflinchingly. And so the incident of Lene's and Botho's connection is covered; it has left no external traces, but we know that these two will have no love to give elsewhere; they will live their whole lives remembering their short spring-time and, fulfilling Lene's words, "without happiness."

In the philosophy of Botho's fellow-officer, "they are out of the trap, but they have left a piece of life hanging to it."

Lene Nimptsch is to me the finest figure in the whole Fontane gallery; there is a splendid epic-quality about her. Her character is molded with such sweep of line and such proud simplicity of contour that we marvel because there is no loss of animation and appealing detail. Here is the triumph of a consummate realism. There could be no more powerful contrast to set forth Lene's superb strength than that with the pretty littleness of Käthe. It is her courage in the fact of desperate hurt - and the suffering before her was as subtle as any woman was ever called upon to endure - that makes certain scenes in which she figures surely the most powerfully moving Fontane every wrote. Numerous side-lights play upon the problem of the novel's central motive. That inimitable creation, Frau Dörr, with her comic aplomb, her half-wisdom which amounts to more than ignorance, her free and easy acceptance of the order of the universe, stands for the relation which is the cheap counter-type of Lene's and Botho's. Königin Isabeau and her companions of the demi-monde at Hänkel's Ablage represent still another phase of the question. The circle of worldly-wise officers maintain yet another attitude, but the basic fact of tragedy is everywhere the same, only strengthened by indifference to it

and multiplied in the manifold reflections we see. In the presentation of all these stretches of environment, the versatility and happiness of description which we have marked in other works are present in no lessened degree, but now they are subordinated to more salient features. That which is merely pleasing, accurate in detail and faithful to fact has given way to the forceful and significant. Concerning Irrungen Wirrungen we can make the statement - which is true for the first time of any of Fontane's works - that it has the vital qualities of a great novel.

IV. THE LATER NOVELS (1890-1895).

If Theodor Fontane never greatly exceeded the achievement of Irrungen Wirungen, neither did he know the bitterness of enfeebled later powers and waning accomplishment. What is commonly considered his greatest work was his last novel, Effi Briest, and Frau Jenny Treibel, which some of his critics have rated as his most important work in certain respects, was written only three years before. As a prelude to these final triumphs we have Stine, published in 1890. The dispassionately written little novel has been thought of as a companion-piece or side commentary to Irrungen Wirungen, and it is possible that it was intended to fill such a capacity. We see exposed in it the bare repulsiveness of another aspect of the question with which its greater predecessor had dealt so movingly. Cold necessity has here succeeded tenderness as a basis of relations, and the uninviting and oppressive atmosphere of wine-suppers has replaced the pure air of the fields.

The comely, short-tempered and good-hearted widow, Frau Pauline Pittelkow, is requested by Graf Sarastro von Haldern, who has a proprietary right to command in her establishment, to prepare a supper-party for himself, his sickly young nephew - the Count Waldemar - and his facetious friend, the Baron Papageno, and to ask her sister Stine and Fräulein Wanda Grutzmacher of the theatre to complete the party. The misconceived attempt at gaiety is the beginning of the acquaintance of Stine and Waldemar. The clear perceptions, charitable spirit and modest resolution of the little seamstress who has calmly marked off a definite boundary between certain features of her sister's way of life and her own, attract the interest of the young nobleman cut off by ill-health from the usual dissipations as well as from a normal and cheerfully ordered course of existence. In his visits to Stine he asks at first for a comforting friendship alone, but presently he finds himself wanting much more. When he has taken his resolve to marry her in defiance of social distinctions, he seeks to persuade his uncle Sarastro to be his advocate with his family, since he wishes to avoid tempestuous scenes at all hazards. But his uncle, in spite of the fact that it was he who introduced Waldemar into the Pittelkow circle, disapproves violently of a marriage between a representative of his family and a member of that circle, and refuses all connec-

tion with the affair. His defection is only the forerunner of a coming storm of family opposition, which affects the young count little, since he is possessed of a property as well as of a mind of his own. But a great unexpected factor balks all his arrangements. Stine refuses to marry him, even though she loves him. In reply to his urgings she shows him unsparingly the futility of his plans for a life of idyllic isolation and the impossibility of renouncing the world. She regrets only her own guilt in forgetting, for the sake of a moment's joy, to ask herself whither their relation has been drifting. Now she rejects him with pitiful finality. He accepts her decision quietly; still quietly, he sets his affairs in order and drinks his carefully prepared glass of poison. At the ceremoniously indifferent burial on the Haldern estate it is evident that the family feels great relief at the convenient solution of its difficulties and gratification at the opening up of opportunities for Waldemar's young half-brother. Only Stine feels any grief, because only Stine loved the dead man, with whom nothing but the world's cruel standards kept her from finding a rare and lasting happiness. We see that her tenure of a life which holds so little for her is not to be long.

The novel contains numerous fine figures and significant suggestions, but fewer telling scenes. At that it shows a dramatic effectiveness not frequently found in the

author's earlier work. Although the searching and compelling quality of Irrungen Wirrungen is missing, Stine undeniably retains a certain pathos which reaches out to the sympathies. Without a trace of over-emphasis the great contrast between the hateful environment of the demi-monde and the original and inmost nature of its characters, stands out before us with the clearness of masterly presentation. The whole novel is constructed not boldly but in a satisfactorily workmanlike fashion, and, being denied a sweeping force, puts forth its own subdued appeal.

In 1892 Fontane wrote that "echtes Prachtstück", Frau Jenny Treibel, which apparently has very little in common with Stine, yet which has qualities of one piece with certain consistent features of all of his social novels. We no longer have dealings with the "Verhältnisse" of the two preceding works; we are now transferred into the very respectable and complacent circles of a genuine bourgeoisie. Surely here is the culmination of all "novels of Berlin" - in the more characteristic sense. The skillful analysis of the city's ways of thinking and living, - an analysis made with poignant but tolerant humour and humane maturity of judgment, - is practically the book's sole raison d'être. The action is comparatively very unimportant. Corinna Schmidt, an entirely live young woman, daughter of a keen-

minded, genial and fatally poor professor, is kindly asked to the Treibel villa for a state dinner-party. Frau Jenny Treibel, formerly Jenny Bürstenbinder of the grocer's shop, has enjoyed extraordinary prosperity, but even though her marriage has been blest by her husband's attainment of the title Kommerzien-rat, she still remembers graciously her old friend and former admirer, Professor Wilibald Schmidt. The dinner is successful, in great part through Corinna's brilliant performance in entertaining the guest of honor, a young Englishman. But there is a suspicion, particularly in the mind of Helene Treibel, the daughter-in-law of the family, - who, incidentally, might well serve as model and as unimpeachable pattern for all prigs, - that all of these riches of wit and charm are not displayed for the English Mr. Nelson alone, that their effect on Leopold, the younger Treibel son, has been calculated. With Marcell Wedderkopp, Corinna's conscientious and pedagogical cousin, the suspicion is displaced by certainty, which galls the more since it contradicts his own hopes with regard to the vivacious young lady.

Reality in time fulfills these prophecies; the somewhat insignificant Leopold and the clever Corinna engage themselves to each other, Leopold after a long course of screwing up his scant self-assertiveness to defy his family, Corinna influenced by her love of pretty luxuries and the

brilliant externals of life. But their understanding never attains the dignity of a betrothal. An obstacle, animated but firm as rock, presents itself in the person of Frau Jenny. In order to prevent this utterly unsuitable match - it was most pretentious in a professor's daughter even to dream of such a thing! - she takes steps which she has hitherto refused, to bring into her family a second daughter-in-law from the highly well-brought-up family of Munk in Hamburg. Leopold succumbs, and Corinna, too, consents to a union with long-suffering Cousin Marcell, a husband from her own proper academic sphere. Inclinations are put aside for more ponderable quantities, the proper thing is done, and the story is finished with a wedding-dinner. Between the beginning and the close of the novel there is "no murder nor suicide, bankruptcy nor felony, no violent nor weird scene - only sheer matters of every day," yet there is abundant tracing of human destiny.

Frau Jenny Treibel uses the intellectual approach to our interest and develops its resources to the utmost. One is reminded of Thackeray as he would be with added mellowness. There is humour here of the first rank, - no literary humour, abstracted, and embellished, but the humour of life, mixed with its bitterness, its triviality and its fineness. We have no character introduced for

purely humorous purposes, because there is no such thing in the actual world, but the whole book is a rich mine of humour. The delicate shadings of the character of the peerless Frau Jenny herself are a matter for pure pleasure. The specious sentimentality with which she is always prepared, is poured forth copiously in the scene of her first visit to Corinna. "Ah, youth! My dear Corinna, you don't know what a treasure youth is, and how the pure feelings as yet uncontaminated by a single rude breath, are and remain our best possession. ... Money is a burden and happiness lies elsewhere.' She was silent and sighed softly. Then she continued, 'Ah, my dear Corinna, believe me, it is the little intimacies, only those, that make us happy.'" But when practical contingencies arise, affecting the lady's purse or her successfully if laboriously acquired social position, the gentle old-time unworldliness disappears with magic swiftness to make way for aggressive and sharp-eyed business dealings. Upon her second visit to Corinna, after Leopold has rashly announced his outrageous intention of marrying that young lady, she wears a very different front. "Fräulein Corinna," she says indignantly, "annexed my son Leopold, not vice versa. I regret to say that it seems a planned affair, a carefully-laid trap, yes, a well-considered attack. ... But a mother

has some influence on a weak man, and I doubt if Leopold wants to spend his honeymoon in a fisher's hut at Ahlbeck. The house of Treibel will not place any villa in Capri at his disposal, you may be sure of that." Her favorite old songs can move her to saccharine tears, but nothing in the world can dim her excellent vision for dollars and cents; she is, in a word, the perfect bourgeoisie, unerringly true to type.

There are numerous other characters revolving about the title-personage who, given as full a light as is turned upon her, would present an equal wealth of interest. The voluble Frau Schmolke, housekeeper for the Schmidts, with a reminiscence of her departed Schmolke to fit each hour in the day and each happening of life, is one of the most representative figures of the true gossiping, snug old Berlin. The spreading digression of Fontane's earlier work comes into evidence again here in an abundance of scenes and descriptions unnecessary to the plot. This return to diffuseness has been ascribed to the age of the poet and to a declining technique. It seems more probable, however, that it was now a matter of deliberate intention, for the noteworthy fact about Frau Jenny Treibel is that it is a panorama rather than a picture, essentially a broad description rather than a dramatic narrative. This peculiar character makes the

artistic place of the book somewhat hard to determine but certainly does not depreciate its great value.

In 1895 Fontane wrote his last novel and gave the crowning vindication of his claim to be considered a young writer, as well as the final proof of his mature and triumphant powers. Erich Schmidt calls Effi Briest the ripest fruition of the poet's old age; externally viewed, it was the book with which Fontane reached his widest and most sympathetic audience. He had at last, without sacrificing his individual quality, surrounded his work with the glamour of a more apparent and accessible attractiveness. The field of the novel is again that of the marriage relation, but the present piece is by no means a repetition of his former treatments of that theme; it is, moreover, quite unlike the huge contemporaneous mass of books on the subject. Effi Briest is transplanted suddenly from the sunny freedom of her vivid, chattering girlhood on her father's estate to the drearily intense quiet of life in the home of her husband, Baron von Innstetten, who was an admirer of her mother's, and whose conscientious and ambitious temperament has stiffened into a pedagogical firmness. He is very kind to his young wife, - even though he laughs at her fear of ghosts, - a tender father to their baby daughter, and Effi puts forth for him her best efforts to grow in the new soil,

but she is attempting the impossible. A human plant of her nature can not by the utmost effort take deep hold in such arid ground.

After a while she finds that she is so shallowly rooted that there is nothing to hold her upright. Still almost a child and without a clear consciousness of her responsibility, she yields to the fascination of a Major von Crampas, cavalierly adventurer, with whom she is not even in love. He is only a symbol to her of the world for which she is instinctively reaching out. Her sense of guilt is awakened only in time to be relieved by her husband's promotion in the ministerial service, involving transferral to Berlin. She puts behind her like an unhappy dream the things which have happened in the dead and remote little village, and enters upon a promising new life. Seemingly it is not remorse - for which she has not enough consciousness of guilt - but rather a dread of discovery which troubles her, and even this is practically wiped out by the safe and prosperous years. In time, however, the feared disaster comes; while Effi is away Innstetten finds quite by accident a bundle of Crampas' letters. In his heart the injured husband has no eagerness for revenge; it is only his hurt pride and, of more importance still, the world's conventions in the matter which force him to seek a duel, in which the Major is killed, and to cast out his wife. Ill, lonely, suffering

as a child does who is punished cruelly and arbitrarily, put aside before the eyes of the world by her parents as well as by her rigid husband, seeing her child taught to abhor or, worse, to forget her, Effi leads a wretched existence in her obscure apartment, with only her faithful maid for companion. She must bear the burden for which her parents and her husband are in the last analysis responsible, but she has not strength to bear it for long. At length her mother and father, obeying their natural feelings, relent, and Effi goes back to the beautiful places of her childhood, - but not to live. She is tired out with life, ready for a quiet slipping away and glad at the coming of the wished-for long peace.

It would be difficult to dispute even greater claims of greatness than have been made for Effi Briest. One is forced to marvel and to admire when one considers that here is a supremely pathetic and appealing figure treated without a touch of false emotionalism, and a tragic situation of mis-marriage handled without a single reminder of sensationalism or salacity. In its effort to avoid an appeal to the "gallery" the novel does, indeed, pass very arbitrarily over some important psychological crises, but the motive-threads are kept so well in hand in the later weaving that there is no weakening confusion. Like all of its sister works, Effi Briest contains much description,

but this time it is not nearly so comprehensive of territory. The story is more intent than the earlier work upon its own purposes and attains a correspondingly greater narrative interest, which is a mighty instrument for the conversion of our fullest sympathies.

Effi Briest was a splendid culmination of Fontane's novelistic efforts; he had proved his point, as it were, and fulfilled his career. His last novel was not his last work, however; death came in 1898 when he was still vigorously and successfully productive. He had escaped the painful knowledge of decay, his length of life had not exceeded his period of efficiency, but he felt that it had equalled it, and was glad to know that the two would end together. He was ready to lay down his pen, and he might well be, for he could look back down a long, long ascent of years, stretching upward in steady progress and marked with the milestones of solid accomplishment. Handicapped by the circumstances which often go to make a man's existence scanty and harassed, he had achieved a full and serene life. Without a talent for proclaiming himself loudly and without a dashing temperament, he passed through the world quietly, but as a very gallant gentleman, nevertheless. The same paradox is true of his novels. Sometimes apparently possessing the elements of confusion, they leave an impression of unity, and, entirely unpretentious,

they exert a powerful influence in many directions. One can say of them that they were the work of a man who knew the world, and that they not only repay faithful study now but are likely to be for a very long time an unexhausted source of value to the man who would likewise know the world.

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